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President Shelly Calls for Meeting With NM Education Secretary

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly said he wants to meet with Hanna Skandera, New Mexico Public Education Department secretary designate, about school closures on the Navajo Nation.

President Shelly's announcement came a day after the Gallup McKinley County School board decided not to revote on closing three reservation middle schools on Monday night.

"I want to start the process to see what it's going to take to meet with Sec. Skandera on a government to government basis. We want to see what we can do to prevent the schools from closing," President Shelly said.

The school board voted 3-2 on May 10 to close three middle schools, all of which are on the Navajo Nation.

Community members and Navajo leaders in a series of town hall meetings asked the board to reconsider their decision. The recall item was on the school board's agenda Monday night, but the board didn't take any action on the measure.



“I am very disappointed, that you didn’t act on the action item on the agenda, it would’ve been nice if you tabled it and so we could come together and talk,” President Shelly said during the public comment portion of the agenda.

The President added that he intends to turn the issue over the Navajo Department of Justice to explore legal avenues to keep the schools open.

Citing the New Mexico Indian Education Act, President Shelly said, “We’re partners with the state of New Mexico in the education of Navajo children. There is a need to collaborate.”

President Shelly also stated the Navajo Nation needs to be involved in future decisions regarding restructuring schools that could harm Navajo students.

“Any future decision to be made about the restructuring of the school district involving Navajo students will need to take place with the Navajo Nation representing ... the Navajo children,” President Shelly said.

Navajo Council Delegates Edmund Yazzie, Mel Begaye, Roscoe Smith and Leonard Tsosie all spoke at Monday’s meeting against the school closures.

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